

Reconstruction Seminar

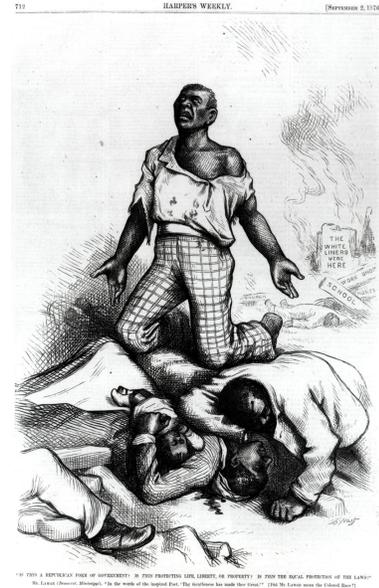
CQ: To what extent did Reconstruction forge a “more perfect union”?



"The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun;
then moved back again toward slavery."

--W.E.B. DuBois

The surrender by Confederate General Robert E. Lee to Union General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox marked the end of one period of violence and regional difference in the United States and the beginning of another. Reconstruction (1865-1877) is the period of time following the American Civil War (1861-1865) when some politicians and citizens sought to reunify the nation, integrate freed slaves into society and the economy, establish political and economic rights for all African Americans, and determine what role the U.S. government would play in implementing these policies while preventing another civil war from breaking out.



On the contrary, some politicians and citizens resented the prospect of there once again being a single nation, rejected equal protection under the law and birthright citizenship in the United States, no matter a person's race, and refused to accept the termination of slavery as an institution and practice. Historian and scholar W. E. B. DuBois wrote of this complex time that "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery."

For this seminar, students will:

- Analyze primary and secondary sources to identify differing perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of Reconstruction.
- Evaluate policies, laws, and proposed solutions to key issues of Reconstruction, including labor rights, voting, land ownership, public safety, and political representation.
- Evaluate the extent to which decisions made during Reconstruction continue to influence social, political, economic, and cultural practices, institutions, and perspectives today.
- Participate in a seminar to discuss interpretations of the documents and consider the perspectives expressed by fellow participants before establishing a position on the CQ.

Note: Each document title includes a hyperlink to the original document and/or supplemental materials to support further inquiry.

Context: To establish a background for this era in U.S. history, review the timeline provided by the 2019 PBS program [Reconstruction: America after the Civil War](#).

Document One. Excerpt from a letter sent by a resident of Rodney, Mississippi regarding the use of militia in the county. *Harper's Weekly*, January 13, 1866, [“The Labor Question at the South”](#)

“The militia of this county has seized every gun and pistol found in the hands of the (so called) freedmen of this section of the county. They claim that the statute laws of Mississippi do not recognize the negro as having any right to carry arms. They commenced seizing arms, and now the plantations are ransacked in the dead hours of night by Captain WILCOX and company. There are no Union troops here, not even a Provost-Marshal nearer than Fayette; and of course the (ex-rebel) militia are having full sway, although they give Fayette a wide berth in their operations, not wishing to come in contact with the Provost-Marshal. Several of the guns seized belonged to the disbanded colored soldiers.”

“Undoubtedly the whites would like to exasperate the blacks into insurrection, that there might be a good excuse for their extermination. Meanwhile, it is indisputable that the behavior of the freedmen is generally as patient and loyal as it was during the war...That this is to be so in our Southern States is plain, and the duty of the government, which has freed the slaves, is to consider in what way it can best secure that freedom.”

Retrievable at: <https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv10bonn/page/18>

Document Two.

“And not this man?” by
Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly*,
August 5, 1865.

[Credit: Library of Congress.](#)



Document Three. [Senate Report 693, Part 1, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 1880](#)

Testimony of R.C. Badger of North Carolina, speaking to Senator Zebulon Vance of North Carolina.

TESTIMONY OF R. C. BADGER.

R. C. BADGER was sworn and examined as follows:

By Senator **VANCE**:

· **Question.** Mr. Badger, you have been summoned before the Exodus Committee to give us the causes of the exodus of the colored people from North Carolina, and, as preliminary to that, I will ask you to state what is the condition of the colored people in regard to their political rights, and otherwise. What is your profession?—**Answer.** I am a lawyer.

Q. What are your politics?—**A.** Well, sir, I belong to the honest-money branch of the Republican party. I believe in a government capable of keeping peace between the States, and in the States, and protecting people in the States, and a man at the head of the government who can carry these things out.

Q. What positions have you held in North Carolina?—**A.** I was twice in the general assembly, and last year was in the constitutional convention of the State. I was justice of the peace, and recorder of deeds; I have been prosecuting attorney in the county several terms, and have been United States district attorney for the western district of North Carolina, but finding myself in discord with the present administration, I resigned last year.

Q. Will you please state now the condition of the colored people in North Carolina?—**A.** As you know, Senator, I am intimately wrapped up in their prospects. I was opposed to slavery. I have lived with them all my life, and studied their character. They are slowly developing in North Carolina in my section of the State. I am from the city

Document Three (continued)

Q. Will you please state now the condition of the colored people in North Carolina?—A. As you know, Senator, I am intimately wrapped up in their prospects. I was opposed to slavery. I have lived with them all my life, and studied their character. They are slowly developing in North Carolina in my section of the State. I am from the city of Raleigh. They are beginning to accumulate property, and becoming self-reliant. They were not so until very lately. They were not self-reliant, but they are slowly and gradually improving. If the committee will reflect that for two hundred and fifty years, taken from a barbarous country, and kept in slavery, and now allowed to own property, they will understand the condition of the negro; but there is a slow and gradual development in my section of the State. When the war ended both the blacks and whites went together, and all utterly bankrupted as to property. Those who cultivated the soil had to go into the control of men who made advances, and they made their advances at from 15 to 25 per cent. on the price of the things advanced. Extreme poverty has by degrees brought them out, and, in my section, they are getting along reasonably well. They don't get exact justice in the courts. They are easily convicted of larceny, and, frequently, in my judgment, on insufficient testimony. I know some of our judges, and most of them have set aside verdicts that were wrong, and our supreme court never fails to do them justice. There was a time in 1871 up to about two years and a half ago, that they were treated with great barbarity, during the time of the ku-klux, but the situation and present relations between the races I think quite as good as could be expected among a people divided so by color. There is that distinction which I think would prevail against them anywhere, where they would go in large numbers. I took occasion to consult the colored solicitor of our circuit after I received the telegram of your sergeant-at-arms, and he goes further, and says that he sees no distinction made between them on account of their color at all. I do. The old loco-focos (that is what I call them, though some people call them bourbons)—the old loco focos down there cheated them out of their votes, but I don't think that has had anything to do with the exodus.

Document Four. [Amendment XIV](#). Passed by Congress June 13, 1866. Ratified July 9, 1868.

Section 1.

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Section 2.

Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed. But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of electors for President and Vice President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the executive and judicial officers of a state, or the members of the legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such state, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such state.

Section 3.

No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any state, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any state legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any state, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Section 4.

The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned. But neither the United States nor any state shall assume or pay any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against

the United States, or any claim for the loss or emancipation of any slave; but all such debts, obligations and claims shall be held illegal and void.

Section 5.

The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Deliberation about the 14th Amendment recorded in the Congressional record can be accessed here: [May 30, 1866](#).

Document Five. [Amendment XV](#). Passed by Congress February 26, 1869.
Ratified February 3, 1870.

Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2.

The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Document Six. [Condition of Affairs in the Southern States](#) (Congressional Report, 1872). Testimony provided by Hampton Parker, Spartanburgh, South Carolina, July 10, 1870, before the U.S. Congress about attacks by the Ku Klux Klan.

SOUTH CAROLINA—Continued.

SPARTANBURGH, SOUTH CAROLINA, July 10, 1870.

HAMPTON PARKER (colored) sworn and examined.

By the CHAIRMAN :

Question. Do you live in this county ?

Answer. Yes, sir. I live about eight miles and a half from here, at Mr. King's place, below that old camp ground.

Question. How long have you lived in this county.

Answer. I suppose about twenty years.

Question. Where did you live before ?

Answer. I was born in the low country, and my old master moved up here. Mr. Parker lives out here now at Rich Hill.

Question. What business do you follow ?

Answer. I follow farming.

Question. Have you land rented, or do you work on shares ?

Answer. I am working on shares now.

Question. Have the Ku-Klux ever been to disturb you ?

Answer. Yes, sir.

Question. When ?

Answer. I reckon it has been about two months ago, as nigh as I can get at it.

Question. Go on and tell the committee what they did to you.

Answer. They whipped me. They came in upon me and whipped me. When they first came in they asked me who did I belong to. I told them my name was Hampton Parker. They said, "Who did you belong to?" I said, "Mr. Parker I used to belong to, and go by the name of Hampton Parker." "Where do you live now?" they said. I said, "I am staying now at Mr. Sam. Mean's place, farming." They first asked me if I had a gun, and to bring out that gun. I had brought the gun out before. I had stepped out when I heard an owl over the fence, but that was when they came to the first house. I had heard an owl, and had stepped out after it. They were coming down the line then. I took the gun out then; I sat it over my door; when I came back I laid it in the corner of the chimney. They made such an alarm that it scared me, and they asked me where was the gun, and I said, "It is here." They told me to get it. I told them I would get it. They said, "Get it quick." I said, "I left it lying in the chimney," and I went to get it, and they asked me what I was doing with it. I told them I had 'low'd to shoot at the owl that was going to catch the chickens. They said I was a d—d liar. I said no, I was not. He said, "I'm going to shoot you." I said, "O, no, master; I have done no harm." Says he, "I'm going to shoot you." Says I, "Please don't." He says, "I will do it;" and he took a pistol and rammed it to my breast, and said, "Do you know what this is?" I says, "Yes; I know." They

Document Six (continued)

knocked it against my head. I had two pistols, one at my breast and another at my head. They brought in the gun; I had it loaded; they put it against my breast, and said, “Do you know what is in that?” I said, “Yes, sir.” They asked me for cartridges. I told them I knew nothing about them, for I never saw any in my life. They asked for my pistol. I said I never had one. They asked for a line to hang me. I told them I had no line. I had this coat lying on a stick. They dragged it down. They had broken the door down. They pulled this over my head. I told him, “Master, I have a handkerchief in my pocket.” They took that and drew it across my eyes so tight that they almost put my eyes out. I ’low’d that would be the last of me, though I was not guilty of anything. They said, “Let’s go.” It was just as blind as midnight to me, but I knew that they were neighborhood people, and God knows it. They took me by the arm and double-quick’d me about one hundred and eighty or two hundred yards. I was a cripple too. They asked me what crippled me. I told them, “Driving the coach for my boss all the time.” They said, “I will cripple you better than that. Hurry up, and let’s go to the other company.” I could not see, being blindfolded. By the time I got there, just in the twinkling of an eye, they had hauled off my shirt this side and that side, and tore it loose and took it off. They didn’t give me time or wait for me to unbutton it; they jerked it right off, and slipped it over my head; and they hauled my suspenders over my shoulders. They got over the fence, and cut and handed brushes with the peaches and all on them; they were young peach trees about as big as the end of my finger. Then they gave me about forty or fifty lashes that cut me into the flesh. I never have had such a whipping since I have been a man grown; I might have got it when I was a little boy, for little children have to have whippings; but I have always tried to behave myself, and act like a negro ought to act, and I didn’t think there would be ever such a time as this. I had laid out in the woods for months like I was a dromedary or a hog or a cow, afraid to go into the house; that was hard, I think, for poor negroes; but I knew it was neighborhood people did it.

Question. Do you know who they were?

Answer. I could not preserve the voices at all when I was blindfolded, they were talking so furious.

Question. What makes you think they were neighborhood people?

Answer. I know it because, there has been so much riding about in the neighborhood; since so many of them have happened.

Question. How were they dressed?

Answer. One had horns—the one that put the pistol to my breast. I was right by the fireplace. I was turning up my old eyes to find him out, but his voice was so curious I couldn’t tell, and for fear I could tell him he had me blindfolded in the twinkling of an eye. When he got my ammunition and gun that was all they wanted.

Question. Did they take the gun?

Answer. Yes, sir. I have never seen it since.

Document Seven. Based on your own research, identify a primary source document that introduces a perspective not included within the original documents provided for this seminar. This additional document can support your response to the CQ for the seminar.

Citation information (Author, title, date, publication):

Web address:

Document Eight. Based on your own research and what you have learned from the documents included herein, identify a resource (news article, audio recording, video clip, etc.) that addresses a contemporary connection between an issue from the Reconstruction Era and today.

Citation information (Author, title, date, publication):

Web address:

Seminar Notes: